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The Worship of Heaven and Earth by the Emperor of China.

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THIS worship is invested with the deepest interest to the student of the ethnic religions. The antiquity of its observance, the magnificence of its altars, the exalted personages by whom it is performed, the imposing nature of its rites, not less than the controversies which for three hundred years have been waged among Christians in regard to it, combine to give this worship a very conspicuous place in the study of the religions of the ancient nations.

The state worship of the earlier kings of Egypt, Greece, Rome, Phœnicia, Assyria, Babylon, India, no longer exists in real life. If we study it, we do so from books and from the monuments of antiquity. But here we have the ancient worship of China preserved in a living form to the present time. Minor changes in place, form, circumstances, there may have been ; but the essential things remain unchanged. The worship by the Emperor, as now seen in Peking, expresses the mature judgment of Chinese scholars as to the ancient religion of China. This is the orthodox cult, according to the classic writers and the best traditions of the empire.

The altar to Heaven, *T'ien T'an*, is located in the southern suburb of Peking, three miles from the palace of the emperor. The altar to Earth, *T'i T'an*, is in the northern suburb, about two miles from the palace. This location of the two altars is in accordance with the dual principle, *yin* and *yang*, which pervades the worship and Chinese philosophy in general. The south is the region of light and heat, the *yang*; while the north is the region of cold and darkness, the *yin*. Hence the altar to Heaven, which is also *yang*, must be on the south, and the altar to Earth, which is *yin*, must be on the north. It may be remarked in passing that the altar to the Sun is on the east side of the city, and the altar to the Moon on the west. Each of these four altars is situated in a large park, planted with rows of locust, pine, and fir trees.

The largest of these parks is that which surrounds the altar to Heaven. This contains some five hundred acres of ground, and

is enclosed by a wall of brick fifteen feet high and above three miles in length, covered throughout with tiles. Within this park, extending nearly the entire distance from north to south, is a second wall enclosing the sacred places, buildings and altars. Here, in the northern part of the enclosure, is an altar for prayer for bountiful harvests, which is crowned by a dome-shaped pavilion above one hundred feet in height, having three successive roofs covered with azure tiles, the two lower roofs extending out in widening circles around the dome, while the upper roof covers the dome and is surmounted by a large gilt ball. The whole is designed to represent the blue vault of heaven, and presents a very grand and beautiful appearance. The name of this edifice is *Ch'i Nien Tien*, Temple of Prayer for the Year, that is, for a year of abundant harvests. This altar and temple, however, are only mentioned by the way, as adjoining that to which attention is mainly directed.

The open altar to Heaven has the greatest antiquity and importance. This is situated in the southern part of the enclosure mentioned above, and is separated from the temple in the northern part by a high wall. The altar to Heaven is built of white marble, and stands under the open sky. The structure is in three concentric circular terraces, rising one above another, and each surrounded by a richly carved marble balustrade. The diameter of the lowest terrace is two hundred and ten feet, of the middle terrace one hundred and fifty feet, and of the uppermost terrace ninety feet. The last is a circular flat surface, about eighteen feet above the level of the ground. It is paved with white marble slabs, which are so arranged as to form nine concentric circles around one circular stone in the center. Upon this stone the Emperor kneels when he worships. The innermost of these circles has nine slabs, and the number of slabs in each receding circle is a multiple of nine, the outermost having the square of nine, which is a favorite number in Chinese philosophy.

The altar is round, as representing the circle of Heaven. It is built of white marble rather than of dark, because Heaven belongs to the light, or *yang*, principle in the dual philosophy. The ascent to the altar is by three flights of steps on the north, the east, the south, the west, each flight having nine steps. The first flight lands one on the first terrace, the second flight on the second terrace, the third flight on the third terrace, or top of the altar.

Besides the two walls already mentioned, there are two nearer walls surrounding the altar at some distance from each other, and having a grove of ancient cypress trees between them. Between the third and fourth wall is a hall for the five hundred musicians, and a stable for the sacrificial victims. Within the fourth wall, that nearest the altar, is the Hall of Abstinence and Fasting, for the use of the Emperor during the night previous to his annual sacrifice ; also the small round building called the Temple of the Imperial Expanse, in which the tablet to Heaven and the tablets to the Imperial Ancestors are deposited when not in use ; two smaller temples containing the tablets for the secondary objects of worship ; the Depository for the Sacred Utensils ; the Depository for the Sacrificial Vessels ; the House for Slaying the Victims ; the Furnace for the Holocaust ; the pones for the lanterns, and the other things necessary for the worship.

Answering in all important respects to the altar of Heaven is the altar to Earth, on the north side of the city. The grounds of this park are square, and contain about three hundred acres, the whole being enclosed by a high wall two miles in length. The altar itself and the buildings erected upon it are second in magnificence only to the altar to Heaven and its buildings, even as the place which the worship of Earth holds in the national cult is second only to that of the worship of Heaven.

The altar to Earth is square, while the altar to Heaven is round, the Earth being square and the Heaven round. The altar to Earth is made of dark-colored marble, since the earth belongs to the *yin*, or dark principle. It has two terraces instead of three. The lower terrace is one hundred and six feet square, the upper terrace, or top of the altar, is sixty feet square, and it is open to the sky, as is the altar to Heaven. This terrace is about twelve feet above the level of the earth.

The top of the altar is paved with marble slabs quadrangular in form and laid in squares around a central square upon which the emperor kneels in worship. Each of these squares consists of successive multiples of eight, instead of nine as in the circles on the altar to Heaven. Balustrades of dark-colored marble surround both terraces.

This altar is encompassed at the base by a stone-walled trench, six feet wide and eight feet deep. At the time of the sacrificing this trench is filled with water. There are four bridges across the trench, each opposite to, and connecting with, one of the four

flights of steps at the cardinal points of the compass by which the altar is ascended.

Like the Altar to Heaven, this altar also is separated from the street by four walls, which are covered with yellow tiles, as representing the color of the earth. Within the fourth wall, that nearest the altar, are the Hall of Abstinence and Fasting; the small square building called the Temple of the Spirit (or Goddess) Imperial Earth, in which are deposited the tablet to the Earth and the tablets to the deceased Emperors of the present dynasty; two smaller temples which contain the secondary tablets used in the worship of Earth; the Depository for the Sacred Utensils; the Depository for the Sacrificial Vessels; the House for Slaying the Victims; and the open iron urn for burning the offerings.

What is to be noted in regard to these buildings is, that in their location and form they are arranged in accordance with the dual principle, *yin* and *yang*, as are the two altars themselves and all the rites of worship. The temple for depositing the tablet of Earth, and the buildings for the secondary tablets, are on the south side of the altar, facing the north, which is *yin*, while the corresponding temple and buildings at the Altar to Heaven are on the north of altar, and face the south, which is *yang*. The temple for the tablet of Earth is square, built upon a square elevation, and surrounded by a square wall, as for the worship of Earth; while that for the tablet of Heaven is round, built upon a round elevation, as for Heaven.

The entrance to the Altar to Earth is from the west, through a very imposing honorary portal, and over a fine paved causeway.

The altars to the Sun and Moon, though secondary in rank, are constructed on the same general plan, and with constant regard to the dual principle. Similar are the altars to the Gods of the Land and Grain, to the Spirits of Heaven, to the Spirits of Earth, and to the Divine Husbandman, all of which are in the open air.

Having described the grounds, buildings, and altars, it will be in order next to speak of the tablets, their position on the altars, and the offerings set before each. When the time of worship has come, these tablets are brought out from the temples in which they are kept, and with great reverence placed, each in its proper position, upon the altars. First of all the tablet to Heaven is placed upon a table, within a circular tent of blue satin, on the north part of the upper terrace of the Altar to Heaven. Thus the tablet will face the south, since it belongs to the *yang* principle, and the emperor will prostrate himself towards the north.

Upon this tablet are inscribed in gilt six Chinese characters (皇天上帝之位), of which the sound is *Hwong T'ien Shang Ti Chih Wei*, and which signify, "The Throne of Sovereign Heaven, the Supreme Ruler." There is a double apposition in the inscription, *Shang Ti*, Supreme Ruler, being in apposition with *Hwong Tien*, Sovereign Heaven, so that "Supreme Ruler" is none other than "Sovereign Heaven." Thus it is understood by all native scholars. There may be some who would fain regard "Sovereign Heaven" as the dwelling place of *Shang Ti*, whom they somehow conceive to be distinct from and above Heaven, in fact as the true Lord. Such should be reminded that in the ancient classics and in Chinese dictionaries *Tien*, or Heaven, is always the equivalent of *Shang Ti*, Supreme Ruler, and that we may not depart from Chinese usage in rendering this inscription.

Upon this same upper terrace of the altar, on the east and west, are placed, in tents of blue satin open toward the center of the altar, tablets of the deceased Emperors of the present dynasty. Each tablet stands in a finely carved and gilded case, resting on a pedestal of corresponding workmanship. These tablets are arranged according to their priority on the throne. The founder of the Manchu dynasty occupies the place of honor, which is the first place on the left of the tablet to Heaven. The second place, that at the right of the tablet to Heaven, is occupied by the second Emperor of the dynasty, and so on in the order of their succession to the throne. There are no other tablets on the upper terrace besides those which have been mentioned,—the tablet to Heaven and those to the Imperial Ancestors.

It is to be observed that in this arrangement the tablets to the deceased Emperors are regarded as *P'ei Wei* (配位), that is, mated with, equal to, associates of, *Shang Ti*, or *Tien* (Heaven) in honor and worship. Similarly on the Altar to Earth these tablets are regarded as *P'ei Wei*, mated with, equal to, associates of, Earth in honor and worship. Of course it can not be intended that the Emperors at death have become equal in magnitude and dynamic forces to Heaven and Earth. The idea would rather be that they are exalted to this honor as being equal in virtue to Heaven and Earth, and as having lived throughout all the functions of their being in entire conformity to that universal law which pervades Heaven and Earth, that is to the law of nature. It may also include the idea that the Emperor is the vicegerent of Heaven and Earth in the sway he exercises, his authority over men. It is

said also of Confucius that his virtue was equal to Heaven and Earth, *Tēh p'ei T'ien Ti* (德配天地).

The offerings which are set forth on this uppermost terrace of the round altar are in accordance with the idea of the equality of the tablets. Before the tablet to Heaven are placed the libation of wine, offerings of silk, the round blue jade stone as the symbol of Heaven, a young heifer, a sheep, a swine, and the various viands, twenty-eight in number, all arranged in suitable vessels and in proper order. The same offerings, including the heifer, and excepting only the jade, the sheep, and the swine, are placed before the tablets to the Imperial Ancestors on the east and west sides of the altar.

On the second terrace, which is six feet lower, and encircles the uppermost terrace with its white marble-paved surface thirty feet wide, are placed, on the east fronting the west, the tablet to the Sun, and on the west facing the east, the tablet to the Moon, each enclosed in a blue satin tent, with offerings of the medium class, less in dignity than those on the upper terrace, arranged before them.

Next to the tablet to the Sun on the same terrace, also on the east and facing the west, are tablets to the Seven Stars of Ursa Major, the Five Planets, the Twenty-eight Constellations, and to All the Stars of Heaven. These tablets are all placed in one satin tent, with offerings of the inferior class according to the ritual arranged before them.

On the same terrace, on the west side and facing the east, next to the tablet to the Moon, are placed in one satin tent, four tablets, one each to the Clouds, Rain, Wind, and Thunder, with offerings of the same class set before them.

Such are the tablets and such the order of their arrangement on the Altar to Heaven. On the Altar to Earth the tablets and their arrangement correspond, *mutatis mutandis*, to those just described. First of all on the upper terrace is placed the tablet to Earth, enclosed in a yellow satin tent, on the south side of the altar, the tablet facing the north, which belongs to the *yin*, or dark principle. Thus the emperor, entering the inner enclosure and ascending the altar from the north, will prostrate himself toward the south, the reverse of all which takes place at the Altar of Heaven.

Upon this tablet are inscribed, in gilt, Chinese characters of which the sound is *Hwong Ti Ch'i chih Wei* (皇地祇之位), and

which signify, "The Throne of the Imperial Earth Spirit (or Deity)."

Along with this tablet are placed upon the same upper terrace, on the east and west sides of the altar, the tablets of the Imperial Ancestors of the present dynasty. These are arranged on either side of the tablet to Earth, in tents of yellow satin, each tablet enclosed in a carved and gilded case, the order being the same as on the Altar to Heaven. These tablets are the *Pe'i Wei*, that is, they are mated with, equal to, associates of, Imperial Earth in honor and worship. The tents are of yellow color, in order to correspond to the color of the Earth.

Upon the second terrace, which is six feet below the upper, and extends out beyond the upper twenty-three feet on each side, are placed secondary tablets. On the east facing the west, in tents of yellow satin, are tablets to the Five Lofty Mountains, to the Two Mountains Ch'i Yün and Lung Yek, to the Three Hills of Perpetual Peace, and the tablet to the Four Seas. On the west facing the east, in similar tents, are tablets to other Five Celebrated Mountains, to the Pillar of Heaven, to the Two Mountains of Splendid Fortune, and the tablet to the Four Great Rivers. All of these, it will be noticed, represent parts and powers of the Earth, as in the worship of Heaven the secondary tablets stand for parts and powers of Heaven.

The offerings set forth on the uppermost terrace before the tablet to Earth are the same as those set forth before the tablet to Heaven excepting that the jade is yellow and square, as symbolizing the Earth, instead of being blue and round, as symbolizing Heaven, and the offering of silk is yellow instead of blue. There are the same libations of wine, the young heifer, the various viands, some twenty-eight in number, all arranged in suitable vessels and in proper order. The offerings to the Imperial Ancestors are the same on both altars, and of the same class as those to Heaven and Earth.

Before the tablets on the second terrace of the Altar to Earth are placed in order offerings of the second and third class according to the ritual.

The time of the worship is also arranged according to the dual principle, *yin* and *yang*. The worship of Heaven comes at the winter solstice, because then the power of the *yin*, or dark principle, has run its course and is exhausted, and the power of the *yang*, or light principle, represented by Heaven, again begins to assert

itself. The days begin to lengthen; nature prepares herself once more for the glories of spring and summer.

The worship of Earth comes at the summer solstice. Then the power of the *yang*, or light principle, is exhausted, and the power of the *yin*, or dark principle, represented by Earth, begins in turn to assert itself. The days begin to grow shorter. Forces have come into operation which in due time will bring autumn and winter. Such are the ideas underlying and controlling the times of this worship.

On the day previous to the winter solstice "the Emperor comes forth from his palace in great state, proceeding to the sacred grounds, part of the way in a chair, part in a chariot, attended by a large retinue composed of officers of every rank, military guards, musicians and others, to the number of nearly two thousand." Arriving at the place, he first burns incense and prostrates himself before the tablet to Heaven and the tablets to his Ancestors. This is done in the little temple in which these tablets are deposited when not in use. Then he inspects the altar, and the various sacred buildings, implements, and sacrificial victims. This done he retires to the Hall of Abstinence and Fasting for the night.

About two hours before sunrise he is summoned to engage in the worship. Arrayed in sacrificial robes of azure color, to represent the color of the sky, he proceeds to the southern gateway of the enclosure containing the altar. There he remains standing outside the gate while the proper officers of the Sacrificial Court with great ceremony remove the tablets from the sacred buildings in which they are deposited, and place them in due order upon the upper and second terraces of the altar.

When the announcement is made that all is in readiness, the tablets and offerings being all arranged according to the ritual, the Emperor passes through the gate and proceeds to the altar to perform the worship. Everything is done according to the most elaborate and carefully prescribed rules, and under the direction of the Master of Ceremonies. Each position and motion of the Emperor, as well as of the imperial princes and high magistrates attendant upon him, also of the musicians and others engaged in the worship, even down to the soldiers and servants, is regulated by these rules.

The service opens by peals of music. The Emperor in his robes of azure ascends the altar by the steps on the south, and

advances to his place at the center of the round altar in front of the tablet to Heaven, having on his right and left the tablets to his Ancestors. There he stands while the whole burnt offering is consumed in the furnace southeast of the altar. The "three kneelings and nine prostrations"—three prostrations with the head to the pavement at each kneeling—are now performed before the tablet to Heaven and before each of the tablets to his Ancestors. The libations are poured out, the offerings are presented, and the written prayer.

The whole scene is very impressive. The gray dawn, the pale light from the suspended lanterns, the absence of any images, the silence of the multitude in attendance, interrupted only by the swell of music, while the Emperor and, as it were, High Priest of four hundred millions of people, attended by princes, magistrates, soldiers, musicians, servants, here pays his annual worship to High Heaven and his Imperial Ancestors, and to all the Powers of Heaven.

When the service is ended, the round azure jade, the symbol of Heaven, and all the tablets are returned in the same reverential manner, each to its proper temple and place. The written prayer, the rolls of silk, and all the offerings on both terraces, are removed and burnt, or otherwise disposed of; the Emperor retires from the scene of worship, ascends his chariot, and returns to his palace.

The worship on the Altar to Earth is very similar to that just described. On the day previous to the summer solstice the Emperor comes forth from his palace in like magnificent state, with a like retinue, and proceeds to the Altar to Earth in the northern suburbs of the city. Arriving there, he first burns incense and prostrates himself before the tablet to Earth and to his Ancestors, in the small temple in which these tablets are deposited. After this he proceeds to inspect the altar and buildings, as in the worship at the Altar to Heaven, and then retires to the Hall of Abstinence and Fasting for the night.

About two hours before sunrise the time is announced by the officer in attendance, and the Emperor, arrayed in his sacrificial robes, repairs to his place of waiting outside the north gate of the square wall nearest the altar. Here he remains while the tablets are removed with great ceremony from the sacred buildings, and placed in order upon the upper and second terraces of the square altar.

When all is in readiness, at a word given by the Master of Ceremonies, the Emperor ascends the altar and performs the worship, the time, attendants, music, and ritual, in all respects corresponding to that on the Altar to Heaven. His robes and the satin tents are yellow, as befits the color of the Earth. He ascends the altar from the north and worships toward the south. As on the Altar to Heaven, so here, before the tablet to Earth and the tablets to his Ancestors he performs the "three kneelings and nine prostrations." The libations are poured out, the offerings are presented, and the written prayer.

As in the worship of Heaven, so here in the worship of Earth, the high position of the chief worshipper, his princely attendance, his numerous cortège, the absence of any image, the grey dawn, the profound silence, interrupted only by the swelling strains of music, all conspire to render the service impressive in the highest degree.

When the worship is ended, the square jade stone of yellow color which is the symbol of Earth, the tablet to Earth, and the tablets to deceased Ancestors, with the tablets to the various parts and powers of Earth, are all returned to their places for safe keeping in the adjacent temples, while the written prayer, the rolls of silk, and the other offerings are either burnt or otherwise disposed of.

The Emperor retires from the scene in due form, ascends his chariot, and is escorted to the palace.

Such in general outline is the worship of Heaven and Earth by the Emperor of China, performed annually in the suburbs of his capital. It will have been observed that the offerings and prostrations to Heaven and to Earth are essentially the same, even as the parks, altars, and buildings mutually correspond. If there is any difference in the honor paid to Earth and to Heaven, it is only in subordinate respects, and analogous to that paid to the father and the mother in ancestral worship. This analogy is expressed in the couplets "*T'ien Ti, Fu Mu*, (天地父母) "Heaven and Earth, Father and Mother," which are in the mouth of every Chinese, and express what are to him objects of deepest reverence.

This solstitial worship, as it is most ancient, so also is most sacred in the regard of the Chinese. No one but the Emperor or one of highest rank, delegated by him, is allowed to perform it. It occupies the first place in the Ritual as laid down in the Stat-

utes of the Empire, the *Ta Ching Huei T'ien* (大經會典), and stands at the head of all the objects of worship laid down in the imperial cult.

The Christian scholar will ask how this worship stands related to the worship of the true God, the Lord. Acknowledging its great antiquity, he will recognize the fact that it is invested with a high degree of reverence and solemnity ; that the religious feelings are deeply moved in performing its sacred rites ; that there is a certain elevation of mind, a grandeur and awe, which attaches to the worship of the vast Heaven and broad Earth, the sum total of all created things, performed as it is by the monarch of so many millions of human beings. He might grant also that, in the view of those who engage in this worship, there may be a certain force or energy immanent in, and inseparable from, Heaven and Earth, dual in its nature, and conceived of sometimes with greater, and at other times with less of intelligence and personality, able to produce all things, and adequate to the greatest operations and transformations in nature, instituting and maintaining the moral order of the world. Thus it will seem to him to be a system of pantheistic nature worship.

But he will be unable to regard this worship of Heaven and Earth, or of Heaven only, as the worship of the true God, whom Christians adore, for the following reasons :

First, the worship of the true God is the worship of the *Creator* of Heaven and Earth, not of Heaven and Earth.

I think the challenge may safely be given to any student of the Chinese language to produce a single passage from the ancient classics of China in which *T'ien*, Heaven, or its equivalent *Shang Ti*, Supreme Ruler, is spoken of as the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Second, this worship of Heaven and Earth is pervaded by the dualism of Chinese philosophy, which is wholly foreign to the worship of the true God.

In the description above given of this worship, attention was drawn only to what is external and phenomenal in the operation of this dual principle. As regards its internal forces and workings, the discussion is endless. A few sentences taken from the prize essay of Kung Hsien Ho, written for the recent Parliament of Religions, will illustrate this. He writes, “The Absolute, or the Great Extreme (so these words *T'ai Chih*, 太極, are translated in dictionaries and by scholars) producing *yin* and *yang*

(陰陽), the dual principle, is law producing forces. When *yang* and *yin* unite they produce water, fire, wood, metal, earth. When these five forces operate in harmony, the four seasons come to pass. The essences of the infinite, of *yin* and *yang*, and of the five elements combine, and the Heavenly becomes male, and the Earthly becomes female. When these powers act on each other all things are produced and reproduced and developed without end."

Whatever the ideas of this writer may be, if indeed he had any distinct ideas, it is plain that the worship of Heaven and Earth, into which this dualism enters so largely, belongs to the ethnic religions, and can have no affiliation with the Christian doctrine of God.

Third, the solstitial worship of Heaven and Earth is materialistic in its nature and tendency.

Fourth, the worship of Heaven and Earth stands at the head of the Chinese Pantheon, and is inseparably bound up with the worship of numerous other beings and things. The Pantheon of China is large. It includes the various parts and powers of nature, the deceased emperors of every dynasty, deceased sages, heroes and warriors, distinguished statesmen, inventors of useful arts; in general an under world made up of all the objects of worship in the three great religions of the land.